

TWO NEW LOCAL RACES OF THE ASIATIC WILD ASS

BY

The late R. I. Pocock, F.R.S.,

(Zoological Dept., British Museum, Natural History).

The discovery of two local races of Asiatic Wild Asses requiring new names owing to their having been previously wrongly identified was one of the first and most interesting results of my examination of the skins and skulls of the five specimens of the race from Kutch, which, as announced by Sálím Ali (*Journ. Bomb. Nat. Hist. Soc.*, 46, pp. 472-477, 1946), were most generously presented to the British Museum by H. H. Maharao Shri Vijayarajji, when he learnt from the Society, through Mr. W. S. Millard on information I supplied, that the national collection possessed only a single example of this animal. The latter was kindly sent to me in 1940 by H. H. the Maharaj Kumar of Bikanir, as he then was, who procured it from Prince Madansinhji of Kutch, the race being extinct, as he informed me, in Rajputana.

The scientific name of this race is *Microhippus hemionus khur*, originally described as *Equus khur* by Lesson in 1827. Its synonymy and distinguishing characters and my reasons for adopting the generic name *Microhippus* instead of *Equus* or *Asinus* for the Asiatic wild asses will be discussed in a future paper. In the present communication I propose to deal merely with the essential features in which the two new local races differ from the race still inhabiting Kutch, where it is strictly preserved by H.H. the Maharao. Additional details of these two will be also included in the aforesaid paper.

MICROHIPPIUS HEMIONUS BLANFORDI subsp. nov.

(Blanford's Gor Khar)

Equus onager var. *indicus*, Blanford, Mamm. Brit. India p. 470, 1891 (in part; not *indicus* Sclater, 1862, which is a synonym of *khur*).

Locality of the type (Brit. Mus., 91.5.13.1): The Sham Plains, lat. 29°20' N., long. 69°40' E., formerly in E. Baluchistan but now included in Wazaristan.

Distribution: Unknown apart from the locality of the type.

Diagnosis: Distinguished essentially from the Gor Khar of Kutch (*M.h. khur*) by the noticeably greater inferior extension of the rather darker fawn tint of the upper side and the corresponding reduction of the white on the lower side of the head, neck and body; the rump-patch also is less extensive and more obscure. The winter coat in February is also fuller, longer and more wavy, especially on the spinal stripe where it is upstanding.

The skull, which is that of a mature but youngish female, with the facial sutures unfused, differs from that of *M.h. khur* of nearly the same age in its comparatively low crown, lacking the marked convexity of that area as exhibited for example by the skull of Sálím Ali's specimen No. 3 which approaches it more nearly in age. In that respect the skull of *M.h. blanfordi* resembles that of the Kiang (*M.h. kiang*).

In its coloration this new race closely approaches the Syrian and Mesopotamian race (*M.h. hemippus*); but the latter is a much smaller animal, with a strongly convex forehead.

The type and only known example of *M.h. blanfordi* was shot by W. T. Blanford in 1882. Not improbably the race is now extinct; but any information about the wild asses of Baluchistan would be most welcome.

MICROHIPPIUS HEMIONUS BAHRAM subsp. nov.

(The Persian Gor Khar)

? *Equus onager indicus*, Lydekker, Novit. Zool. 11, p. 588, pl. xvii, 1904 (not *indicus*, Sclater).

Equus onager onager. Lydekker, Cat. Ung. Mamm. 5, p. 14, 1916 (not *onager* Boddaert and others).

Asinus hemionus khur. Schwarz, Zool. Garten, 2, p. 85-90, 1929 (not *khur* Lesson).

Locality of the type. (Brit. Mus., 10.7.12.2): Yezd, Central Persia, lat. 32°N., long. 55°E.

Distribution: Only known with certainty from the locality of the type.

Diagnosis: Resembling the Gor Khar of Kutch (*M.h. khur*) in the average proportions of the pigmented and white areas of the head, neck and body but differing in the luxuriance of the winter coat which is from 40 to 45 mm. long, thick and strongly curled, instead of 20 to 25 mm., comparatively thin and only slightly wavy; in the colour which is drabby, greyish brown, instead of sandy fawn; in the extension of the spinal stripe as a strong black line to the tuft of the tail; in the shorter chestnuts on the fore legs and in its narrower hoofs.

Of this race I have seen the flat skins of three specimens (10.7.12. 1-3) shot by R. C. Barker and E. J. Blackman at Yezd. Although undated, unmeasured, unsexed and without skulls, they are obviously in winter coat, are presumably adult, since they equal the Kutch skins in size, and are presumed to be females from the presence of a pair of well developed teats on each. Their individual variations will be described later.

In 1916 Lydekker entered these skins in his catalogue under *Equus onager onager*, although they disagree with all the descriptions of that race, including his own in 1904. In the typical Onager, which ranges as far south as Kaswin in Northern Persia, the white areas invade the upper part of the body, neck and head to a greater extent than in any other race. The Gor Khar, which Lydekker described and figured as *Equus onager indicus* was alleged to have been captured at Meshed in north-eastern Persia. I suggest that the illustration may represent *M.h. bahram* in summer coat; and I have no doubt that that conclusion is true of the wild ass Schwarz identified as *Asinus hemionus khur*, which was living in the Berlin Zoological Gardens and was shipped from Bushire. Although being in summer coat it differed from the winter skins of the Yezd series in its paler hue, it resembled them in the conspicuous extension of the spinal stripe to the tail-tuft, which is not the case in the skins from Kutch, and in the presence of a pronounced black rim above the hoofs such as is shown in the type of *M.h. bahram*, although it is fainter in another of the skins and absent in the third; being obviously a variable feature. It is undeveloped, however, in any of the skins of typical *M.h. khur* from Kutch.